

DECEMBER 2010

OVERVIEW

IIED Governance Group

Project name:

Building the capacity to achieve Millennium Development Goal 7 (environmental sustainability)

Project leader:

Steve Bass

Time frame:

2005–2010

Objective:

To find out how best to ensure environment is incorporated in the key decisions and institutions that govern development in low-income countries.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Received wisdom suggests that environmental mainstreaming is best done through national plans. But on-the-ground successes point to many other avenues, according to learning groups IIED facilitated in Southern Africa and East Asia. Group members were respected figures in environment, development, finance, academia and civil society. They reflected on where environmental protection has combined with poverty reduction in the past 20 years, traced how this was achieved and identified remaining constraints. Lessons learnt from IIED's evaluation of the UN Poverty Environment Initiative fed into the process, and the findings were broadcast in booklets and a new website.

THEORY OF CHANGE

Environment and development are intimately linked, yet their formal institutions occupy separate worlds. Donor efforts to simplify the development challenge – notably through Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) during the 2000s – have overloaded single instruments with multiple issues. Among other things, PRSs are seen as the entry point for integrating environmental aspects of development, or for attending to environmental safeguards. IIED believes environmental mainstreaming is not a short-term project of writing environment words into strategy

New routes for mainstreaming

Integrating environment with development is not just about putting 'green' words in national plans.

In 2002, the World Bank began assessments that looked for a shift in priorities within development. They evaluated countries' progress in incorporating environmental protection into developing countries' Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) – the documents where governments and donors set development goals and aid programmes to lift people out of poverty. They were aware that although PRSs had 'sustainable growth' as a goal, only the 'growth' aspect was getting attention.

But with environment and development long treated as separate and often competing issues, each having its own institutions and advocates, it is tricky to judge success in reconnecting them. Rather than probing the complex reality, the World Bank simply measured whether 'green' words such as 'environment', 'climate' and 'biodiversity' were being written into the national plans.

Many other donors and policymakers have also assumed that the business of planning is the place to start integrating environment and development. But IIED has been looking for approaches that use a wider range of tactics, tailored to each country's context. To find out what is working – not in plans, but on the ground – we brought together learning groups of experts in finance, development, environment and poverty reduction from developing countries.

Lessons from experience

The learning group workshops – held in Malawi, the Philippines, Tanzania, Vietnam and Zambia – were not typical

policy reviews. Rather than evaluating specific instruments for environmental mainstreaming, participants described their country's success stories – situations where poor people benefited from environmental gains such as cleaner water or access to biodiversity. They reflected on how those successes came about, as well as on what gaps still remain. Learning group members – ranging from a former environment minister to current budget officials to the head of corporate responsibility for an African company – brought diverse perspectives and offered an eye-opening array of effective strategies.

In Uganda and Tanzania, governments added environmental questions to public expenditure reviews – recording investments in environmental assets and the returns they yield. Other IIED research has highlighted similar changes driven by the UN's Poverty and Environment Initiative, which helps budget departments with environmental questions. Whereas there is a general tendency to postpone action on environmental issues, this practice results in decisions. Making budgets means making choices, and including natural wealth leads to greener outcomes.

In Zambia, because environment is more prominent in public education – especially in wildlife clubs active in schools for the past three decades – most mainstream decision-makers understand environmental concerns a little better than their counterparts in neighbouring nations.

documents. It is a longer-term process of institutional and behavioural change involving many pathways specific to countries. It is bottom-up as well as top-down; driven by civil society as well as government; a matter of political economy — how environment is valued and by whom — as well as technical concerns about environmental limits. Learning groups reflecting on real-world results can show how to navigate this complex landscape.

KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- Planning tools can help environmental mainstreaming, but Poverty Reduction Strategies are not the only vehicle for this. Outcome-based planning — as opposed to priority sectors — reveals environmental contributions to health, food security and other outcomes. Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) brings order and transparency to the environmental scrutiny of policy.
- The budget really counts — it is often the only point when decisions about environment are made. Public environmental expenditure reviews can help shape a budget that invests more in environment to get more out of it.
- Decision makers need to understand environment. In part this means making better economic cases for environmental investment. But it is also a matter of environmental education — from primary school to civil service training colleges.

PARTNERS' VIEW

I like the approach of working with in-country learning groups and sense that richness in the material — the guidance on environmental mainstreaming is built on real experience and not just theory. I really appreciate the books and the website that support this learning.

Jane Clark
DFID, United Kingdom

IIED GOVERNANCE GROUP

The Governance Group works to secure accountable, transparent, equitable and effective governance for sustainable development at all levels — through generating evidence of processes and institutional structures that work, and how roles, responsibilities and means of engagement can best be improved.



Photo: Bua Hoa Tien

Sharing success: participants in the learning group workshops described their own success stories such as benefiting from cleaner water.

In Vietnam, where the government is seen to impose top-down policies, environmental mainstreaming has started within local governance. Ordinary people, particularly women, connected health problems with pollution, and a few communes — at village or neighbourhood level — created their own environmental regulations and reflected them in their commune development plans. A UN Development Programme initiative has helped spread the movement to more communes.

In Tanzania, the government switched from 'priority sector' planning to outcome-based planning. Instead of choosing one sector, such as agriculture, as the prime object of investment, they described a desired outcome, such as improved food security. Environmental initiatives that contributed to this goal became higher priorities, and environment budgets increased several-fold.

In southern Africa, IIED-backed 'roadshows' raised awareness of another planning tool, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). SEA injects environmental awareness early in policy processes, making it part of their foundation. Learning group participants said the technique had proved its worth in pilot projects and deserved wider roll-out.

Experts from the learning groups collaborated with IIED staff to produce booklets summarising their findings, which in turn fed into IIED's 2009 book *The Challenges of Environmental Mainstreaming*. We also launched a website, www.environmental-mainstreaming.org, where practitioners share tools and case studies. The reports from the learning groups are gaining high-level attention in-country, and some are being invited to stay on as

'learning and leadership' groups offering feedback on major programmes, including the UN Poverty-Environment Initiative.

One further lesson concerns who should drive environmental mainstreaming. In Zambia, IIED had expected to co-host a group with the government's Environment Council. But the finance and planning ministry heard the plan and asked to become a third co-host, so that finance officials could 'own' the results, understand and act on them. This example shows the changing face of environmental mainstreaming. Rather than environmental actors trying to push their priorities onto mainstream players such as finance and sector development, the departments on the 'other side' are starting to demand more information and a leadership role.

The shift reflects growing attention to environmental issues — not just in national plans, but, as the learning groups reported, up- and downstream of them as well. Recognising we've won the general argument that both human and environmental wellbeing are needed for sustainable development, the next step for IIED is to help with specific decisions, such as how much a country should invest in soil conservation. Here we'll need rigorous approaches to environmental valuation and accounting, which will be a major focus of IIED's research and partnerships going forward.

The International Institute for Environment and Development's Reflect & act series showcases innovation and lessons learnt in selected projects from across the institute. See the IIED Group pages on www.iied.org for more.